MR. DURGAN AND THE NEW COOKERY—By Maude Radford Warren

"Nannie went on feeding scientific food to her father."

My own idea is that we should do everything we can for Northerners. Maybe beating us in the civil war was good for the nation at large, but it certainly was bad for the Northerners, because nothing has been able to stop them ever since. Their chase after success has put them into a kind of perpetual motion; they have to be doing something, even if it doesn't amount to anything; only they always think it does amount to something.

It is because he has such characteristics that there are some people in our little community who never will get used to Mr. Durgan. He is a big New Yorker with an Irish core who made a heap of money, and got all tired out keeping hold of it, and so he bought a place in that little nook of the Blue Ridge where a few of us Southerners and some English people live. He said he came to rest, in which case I trust no one may ever see him at work. It was not two weeks before he began courting me—long before any one suspected that he much ~e than knew one lady of our community from another. When I was younger and other gentlemen courted me the fashion of doing so was more deliberate.

When I told Mr. Durgan this he remarked with unpardonable flippancy that he supposed the Southerners stayed to the family portraits for a sign before they picked out a girl.

We all invited Mr. Durgan a great deal to our houses and he seemed to like to come. If we said tea at 4 he'd be there at 4 and keep watching the clock until one of the niggers brought in the tray. When he came to supper at my house if a meal was more than an hour late he would ask me in a cool, horrid way if the cook was sick, when every one knows what niggers are since reconstruction.

But in spite of his irritation at what he called our waste of time Mr. Durgan came to our dinners and suppers whenever he was invited, which was pretty often, and we were all pleased at his appetite—at least we were in the beginning. I believe I was the first one to see that it was waning. He refused hot bread, hot muffins, hot waffles and cakes and cones. In fact, all he would eat of the sort was a slice of cold light bread, which I should think would sit as heavy on any one's stomach as a sin.

Along with his change of diet came a lasting mood that was nothing short of bad temper. At first I thought it was because of the way I held him off in his courting, for I had no intention of immediately letting him find out whether I meant in the end to give him my hand or not. I was not a deal in stocks to be settled between breakfast time and noon. But I will confess, to my mortification, that I soon found out it wasn't my attitude that was bothering him at all, but indigestion. He actually laid it at the door of the hot bread he had eaten with us. Of course he tried not to reflect on our hospitality, for equally, of course, he is a gentleman. Naturally I tried my best to show him that it was not our cookery that was at fault, but the northern difficulties of assimilation. Perhaps I might have convinced him if it had not been for Micajah Carter.

I remember well the first time Mr. Durgan ever saw Micajah. It was soon after he had come South. I was carrying him to call on Nannie Lee. She is all of 28 and very pretty still, and I thought I would like to see if Mr. Durgan's attentions to me would weather acquaintanceship with Nannie, who certainly is fascinating. If he fell in love with Nannie like most every one did, why, then it was better for me to know it at once.

So however one looked at it, taking Mr. Durgan to Nannie's was just in the nature of a dashing adventure with ultimate safety. We were driving toward Nannie's when he first saw Micajah Carter.

"Who ever is that drooping vine and fig tree?" asked Mr. Durgan.

It certainly was true that Micajah drooped just like his place. He was a gentleman, and he looked it when he straightened up to speak to a lady, and as for his bow—well, all the Carters have always been famous for their bowing and curtsying. And Micajah has splendid blue eyes with fire in them still for all his bad luck and hair that makes you just want to put your fingers in the curls of it. But when Micajah was alone, or thought he was, he certainly did—well, not exactly sag or slack, for one would only use those terms of poor white trash, but he made you feel as if his bones and muscles had turned to elastic with the stretch all out of it.

You see, after the war his father had nothing and the whole family went on having nothing, putting more and more mortgages on the place. Now that Micajah was the last and that there was no opportunity to mortgage the land or the house any more he had to mortgage the very crops before he put the seed in. His land was not so very good either, and so he was always in debt, and I reckon if one or two cousins had not died and left him enough to pay off the interest on the mortgages he would have been obliged to emigrate to the north.

So I said to Mr. Durgan: "That's poor Micajah Carter."

"Micajah Kee-aw-tah," he mimicked. For of course the Northerners are often surprised when they hear proper pronunciation.

He kept saying "Kee-aw-tah" over and over again as if he liked it and from that he began to get interested in Micajah and his troubles. I had intended Mr. Durgan to meet Nannie before I told him anything about Nannie's romance, because a gentleman may be either not affected at all by a pretty girl whose heart is in another's keeping or else so much affected that he begins to think she is wasting herself on the other man and tries to give her feelings a new direction. However, I told him how Nannie's sisters were one by one married to Englishmen of good family. The eldest went first and she brought her sisters out, one after another. Only Nannie was obdurate because Micajah Carter was on earth. I can't tell you how much old Major Lee spent on Nannie's clothes when she was in England. But behind every Englishman they showed her she saw the shadow of Micajah. If he were taller than Micajah then he was too tall; if he were just Micajah's height then he didn't carry himself so gracefully; if he was shorter then he was not to be considered. If he were rich then she detested him for having money when Micajah was so poor.

We had got to Major Lee's gate by this time, and a little nigger opened it for us, and the Major and Nannie came out on the steps to meet us. Nannie Lee was as lovely as a dream that day, with her black hair making purple shadows on her forehead and her long black lashes, so heavy it seemed like she could hardly lift them off her pale cheeks. Of course, she was mighty nice to Mr. Durgan. I could see that out of the tail of my eye as I talked to the Major. She always said she had no room in her heart for any man except Micajah Carter; but I notice she was always able to admire a fine looking man, unattached or not.

But when we drove away, if you believe me, Mr. Durgan said nothing about her beauty or the Major's good manner, or the charm of the old Lee house. No, he flicked the whip emphatically over the back of the pony and remarked:

"Sallie Rives, these two people, Micajah Carter and Miss Lee, have the same complaint."

"Of course," I said softly, "doomed never to be united——"

"I am not talking about love," Mr. Durgan interrupted. "It's indigestion ails them; too much hot bread."

I was so shocked I could not speak, and he went on: "It's the wrong cookery down here that takes the fibre out of people. Do you suppose your Micajah Kee-aw-tah would dribble all over his gate if he had the right diet? He would not. Do you suppose she would have that white face and those languid eyes? She would not. He'd get a job in Richmond and elope with her to a three room flat some place, where she could practise sanitary cooking. As it is, they have got pains in their insides and no ambition or enterprise, and they call it romance. I'd show them."

I said as calmly as I could:

"There are enough gentlemen in Richmond working at two dollars a day for white trash whom in the old days even the negroes despised."

"That's all right," said Mr. Durgan, "and if there were more such gentlemen there would be less mortgaging of crops and less leaving the farming to niggers and philandering around oneself in hopeless love."

I said nothing, but then and there I added to the length of time I had inwardly determined on as proper to hesitate before responding to Mr. Durgan's proposal of marriage. I must give him time enough to understand the feelings of Southern ladies and gentlemen.

During the next few days Mr. Durgan and Micajah Carter became fast friends. Somehow Mr. Durgan has a way of getting whatever he wants. It seems to be a Northern characteristic. I have reason to believe also that my suitor called on Nannie Lee once or twice. Presently I found out that his motives were not social, as I had supposed, but that he had been merely seeking to unleash his Northern passion for reform. He wanted to build us over from the inside, but he was working through instruments. Micajah and Nannie were the instruments.

Micajah would go around telling the men that if the crops were poor it was owing to indigestion; then he would proceed to develop Mr. Durgan's theories. By and by Micajah introduced improvements of his own. He knew that the men would have parted from their wives as easily as from their hot bread, so he put the blame of things on their wives. The indigestion was there, he said, and no one could dispute it; only it was not the fault of the hot bread, but of the way it was made.

Nannie talked about the thing at the Woman's Club from the hygienic standpoint till we were most tired to death of it. But when she began to say that our complexions were being ruined by unscientific cookery, and that when we embraced hot bread we invited yellow skins and eschewed red cheeks, then some of the ladies began to listen. They didn't see how they could give up good Southern food, but if there was anything in the new ideas of cookery they thought perhaps there might be some way of compromising, of adapting the new methods to the old material; or, as Mr. Durgan said cynically, and I am sure untruthfully, of both eating your cake and having it.

And of course Mr. Durgan was at the bottom of all that followed, though he covered up his tracks with Micajah and Nannie. It seems that a certain widow, Mrs. Shorting, a great authority on cooking, and with a monthly page on cooking in one of the important woman magazines, was spending the summer in Charlottesville. Nannie insisted that she should be asked to give a course of lectures before our club. Micajah egged on the men to urge the women to have her. And with everybody willing, of course Mrs. Shorting came. She was good looking and still young enough to be able to wear black well; and I cannot help thinking that somehow it was an impertinence for her to have a good figure and a pretty speaking voice when she was merely teaching us how to cook scientifically. It seems to me that bagginess and bored eyes and a slatternly way of moving would have gone better with the work.

It was nothing to me that Mr. Durgan chose to make himself agreeable to her by carrying her to and from Charlottesville in his motor car on the day of her lecture. Nannie Lee said it was nothing to her that Micajah went into the city once a week to see Mrs. Shorting. The only thing she objected to was his excuse. He said he was taking a special course of household economics with her, when of course that was manifestly absurd.

What Nannie and I resented most about Mrs. Shorting was the interest she seemed to take in us. She used to talk to me about Mr. Durgan and to Nannie about Micajah, somehow or other implying that when Mr. Durgan was with her his thoughts were all of me, and that when Micajah was with her his thoughts were all for Nannie. As a matter of fact, while neither of us was as old as Mrs. Shorting, we knew men better than that. When a man is with any particular woman, if he is an attractive man and she has any spirit herself, she does her best to see to it that he shall not have occasion to be brooding over any other woman. So Nannie and I put her talk down to sheer artfulness.

The other ladies of the club sat at her feet. Women always do seem to have that adoring attitude toward any one who is teaching them anything, and I must say that Mrs. Shorting had a high handed and confident way with her. Later on, when she had made them so much trouble, the ladies were not quite so pleased with her. But at first Nannie and I got right sick of the way they were always praising her.

And then her methods were not—not quite delicate. I do not know what my mother would have thought about the words she saw fit to use, and the knowledge she displayed which should belong to butchers and such people and is not supposed to filter into polite society. To be candid, she actually dissected half a cow in our presence. It was quite awful the way she handled its limbs and spoke so openly about its anatomy. Nannie and I lost most of that lesson, for we hardly dared raise our faces, although the married ladies followed it, on economic grounds, they said, for she told them how to judge the grain of the meat and what were the best cuts and what they should pay and all that, and she advised them to have private scales.

Our butcher makes his rounds in a cart three times a week, and soon after Mrs. Shorting's lesson on the cow I met his wife going home to her mother's. The poor creature said that her life was insupportable, and that she was going away until her husband got used to the ruin Mrs. Shorting was bringing on him, or else till he was entirely bankrupt. She said her husband said that this Mrs. Shorting knew entirely too much, and was no lady besides. It seems that his customers had followed Mrs. Shorting's advice absolutely, and they weighed every bit he handed out to them, and they all wanted the same cuts of meat, and there was no use explaining to them that a cow was made up of different cuts and that he could not throw away the parts they refused to buy. She said her husband was trying to sell out to a man he did not like; he could not wish him worse luck than to deal with the kind of customers we had become.

"It seems that his customers had followed Mrs. Shorting's advice absolutely."

And as to Mrs. Shorting's cooking lessons—I must say she knew her subject. She was especially strong on condiments and sauces, but especially opposed to hot bread. I should think a strong tabasco flavor or a hot East Indian curry would be no better for the stomach than hot bread, but perhaps inconsistency has now become scientific and hygienic. At any rate, the ladies followed Mrs. Shorting's lead like sheep, and the grocer had to keep sending for all sorts of exotic spices we and he had never heard of. His stock became so enlarged that he had to move the partition at the back of his shop to give himself more room, and three new travelling men for wholesale groceries came down to solicit orders. Mrs. Shorting seemed surprised at our ignorance now and then. One day she had been talking of flavoring something with pine seeds. We let her go on for a time, and then some one said, timidly:

"Mrs. Shorting, I reckon I don't just know what pine seeds are, and I am sure the grocer hasn't any."

"Pine seeds," said Mrs. Shorting, her chest expanding and her voice rising like a tragedy queen's, "not know pine seeds? Any one who does not know and cannot use pine seeds has not even rudimentary ideas of cooking!"

A bit superior—just a little bit superior—was Mrs. Shorting. I think now that those pine seeds were the beginning of the end. For from that day on she bore harder and harder on the hot bread.

She said that you could not compromise about hot bread. You simply had to eliminate it from your bill of fare. She pictured to the ladies what they would gain in beauty and health if they gave it up, and how their husbands would improve in physique and temper.

I reckon they all intended to begin slowly with their men, but maybe Mrs. Shorting had imbued them with Northern ideas of speed. At any rate, within a month after their reform I don't suppose there were three happy households in our community. The men were sulky or savage, according to their moods; they did not know what was the matter with them exactly, only they acted like they wished they were dead or bachelors. Nannie and I knew what was wrong, of course, and I pointed it out to Mr. Durgan. He seemed right disappointed in the way they were taking the indigestion cure, but said it was only a question of time when they would feel hearty and good natured again, and that the crops would look up, and the South would flourish. Poor Nannie quarrelled with Micajah because he tried to defend Mrs. Shorting's ideas, and she wouldn't speak to him; and, while she was unhappy, it was right much comfort to her that he went around looking wretched, although he kept on going to Charlottesville to see Mrs. Shorting.

Nannie went on feeding scientific food to her father, and the more the Major ate the crosser he got and the more violent in his attitude toward Micajah, who now in his desire to make up with Nannie had taken to driving up and down the chicken road between the Major's place and his. The Major had heard some of Micajah's digestion theories, and he pretended to think that Micajah was insane. One day when Mr. Durgan and I were there, not knowing Mr. Durgan was responsible for the general misery of the community, the Major said bitterly that a man with Micajah Carter's wild ideas would either wind up at the back door of a restaurant or in a lunatic asylum.

Finally, everything seemed to come to a head at once, and the second course of hygienic lectures which Mrs. Shorting had proposed for herself and us never materialized. It was the day of her weekly lecture, and I had seen Mr. Durgan take her off in his car and had assumed, of course, that he had returned from Charlottesville long ago. To confess the truth, I was expecting him, for while I had been slow to make up my mind about accepting him, somehow a summer evening never seems complete without him. I sit on my porch and hear the sleepy birds and watch the shadows under the trees, but the beauty of it all is suspended until that great figure looms up at the gate, and that deep voice says: "Sallie Rives, Sallie Rives that is to be mine, are you there?"

It is presumptuous for him to take so much for granted, but it is very pleasing to have a big man in love with one. So I was waiting for him, and from up the road I heard the sound of his motor car. I knew it was his, for no one else about here has one. I rather wondered at his driving down, for as a rule he walks, as he says it is more homelike when he is coming to me.

The car came whirring on with never a trace of the slowing up action one would expect. Then it passed. Mr. Durgan sat on the front seat, and he never even turned to look at my house. Beside him sat Mrs. Shorting, and naturally she did not turn either. The car whizzed past, and in a moment one could almost have dreamed that it had been there.

Perhaps it was unmaidenly of me in that moment, when I renounced Mr. Durgan forever, to wonder where he and Mrs. Shorting were going—now that he was nothing to me.

Fortunately I was not left long to my effort, for some ladies called, and then more of them came to discuss the unbearable pass to which Mrs. Shorting had brought things in each individual family and how no one ever wanted to see her again and it was all such a bad example for the children. While they were still with me I heard the motor car coming back, but again it did not stop. Under pretence of arranging a blind I went to the window and looked out, for the moon was pretty bright, and while I had given Mr. Durgan up forever yet I did want to see if she was still on the seat beside him. The car passed too quickly, however, for me to tell.

More and more ladies arrived till almost every one was present except Nannie Lee. They said their husbands had got to such a state that it was nothing to them now whether they had the society of their wives or not. Most of the ladies were attended by little niggers with lanterns to light them home.

After they had gone I did not sleep much, trying not to think about Mr. Durgan. I got up very early to make myself a cup of tea, for it is bracing even when one has to face the world alone. I opened all the doors and windows wide, for one must have air even when one's world has gone to pieces, and then, as I bent over my little samovar, I heard Mr. Durgan's car. I shut my eyes. I didn't care now whether she was beside him or not. Of course, I heard the car stop; but I kept my eyes shut while his footsteps came nearer. Then I heard him in the doorway, but I did not turn round. He said, in a low, mighty sweet voice:

"Sallie Rives, Sallie Rives, I hope you know how hard it was for me not to turn my head toward you when I felt your presence on the porch last night. I knew that if I did I'd jump out of the car and let it and Mrs. Shorting go to destruction."

When Mr. Durgan says things like that, so tactful and winning, I wonder if he hasn't been engaged before; but, of course, I never have asked him for fear of finding out.

"I need not tell you that I was on important business," said Mr. Durgan, "and if it had not been for my belief in your trust and intuition I should have come back at two in the morning, when my Charlottesville business was over, to explain everything. Put on your hat, Sallie Rives. We have an engagement to breakfast in Charlottesville."

When a person feels like saying twenty things at once, and is not sure that it's safe to say anything at all, the best plan to follow is to obey the suggestion of some confident man. So I simply put on my hat like he said, and got into the motor car. And because I was so afraid of saying something I really meant, or was really interested in, I talked to Mr. Durgan all the way to Charlottesville about what the ladies of our community had told me the night before in regard to the casting out of Mrs. Shorting. I will confess that it was a relief to me to show Mr. Durgan in this indirect way my opinion of his habit of carrying off things with a high hand. I could not say what I wanted to, which was:

"How dare you drive out at all hours of the night with another woman, attractive in her crude way, I will admit, and then expect me by intuition to understand and approve? How dare you assume that a properly brought up Southern lady looks at things in your masculine Northern way?"

But I could show him that, by his notions about hot bread and indigestion, new cookery and Mrs. Shorting, he had all but disrupted our little society. So I told him how our ladies had decided that it was better to be unscientific and happy; that gloomy and indifferent husbands were too high a price to pay for pure hygiene; and every last one of them was going to have three different kinds of hot bread for breakfast and some of them had broken away from Mrs. Shorting's teaching several days before, and were already winning their husbands back.

And that surprising man only laughed and said:

"Sallie Rives, Sallie Rives, I wonder if your rushlight will ever be turned into a Welsbach burner. Because if it is, half the joy of my life will go."

I laughed appreciatively, because that's always a safe thing to do when you don't know what a man is driving at. Then Mr. Durgan said consideringly:

"All the same, I must make it up to the grocer—and I ought to do something for the butcher too."

By this time we had got into Charlottesville. Hardly any one was on the streets, and it was just as well, for when Mr. Durgan drew up before what used to be the old Russell House I almost screamed.

It was not because the dishevelled looking old place had been repainted and had a new portico and balconies and lace curtains at every window. No; it was because over the door read the words:

"Micajah Carter, Proprietor."

And in the doorway stood Micajah Carter, smiling and straight, not a droop in him anywhere. And just behind him stood Nannie Lee. Only the moment I looked at her face I knew she was not Nannie Lee any more. There's a kind of proprietor look a woman gets the very hour she's married that you can never mistake. She owns a man and she's settled; no more spinster problems for her; and her husband may attend to the matrimonial ones. Nannie's face told me that and a dozen other things as Mr. Durgan led me into the dining room and sat me at a table laid for four.

"Wedding breakfast," explained Mr. Durgan proudly. "Mrs. Shorting and I kidnapped them and got them married last night and they are running this hotel, which I have bought, and Carter is going to fix up his farm as a kind of spring and autumn resort."

I could have seen Mr. Durgan's hand in all this without his explanation. But a Carter and a Lee keeping a hotel! All I could do was turn a reproachful eye on Nannie.

"It was father's idea," she said composedly. "He said that Micajah would end up either in a restaurant or a lunatic asylum, and I consider a hotel a good compromise. Besides, I've always wanted to be in business. I can help Micajah a heap, and I reckon we'll be as rich as Northerners presently."

"Where is Mrs. Shorting?" I asked.

Those two men stared at each other.

"Heavens, Kee-aw-tah," said Mr. Durgan, "we forgot to ask her to the breakfast!"

"I reckon I couldn't be expected to remember," said Micajah comfortably.

Of course, Nannie and I reproached them. After all, it was due to Mrs. Shorting's suggestions that Micajah had got interested in hotel life, and if she had not gone with Mr. Durgan to persuade Nannie to elope they'd never have got her into Charlottesville for a midnight marriage. We began to feel quite friendly toward the poor creature when we thought how ungratefully those men had treated her.

But we might have spared our regrets. Presently she swept into the dining room, the deus ex machina, acting like she had courted Nannie for Micajah and was also quite capable of showing me how to reward Mr. Durgan's attentions.

When we had got into the motor car and were starting homeward Mr. Durgan said to me in an injured and affectionate tone:

"Well, aren't you going to praise me?"

Praise him! I reckon all men are alike at bottom, and the only way you can teach them anything is to marry them, and then show them how ridiculous their actions are in the eyes of women.

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An Example to Great Britain

From The Sketch.

Every man in France is at his post of duty—A French veteran on guard on a railway.